

Evaluative Tools for Articulating and Monitoring Foundation Strategy

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Key Points

- Research shows that while foundation leadership and staff value strategy and foundations largely perceive themselves as strategic, they often struggle to articulate, implement, and track strategy. The William Penn Foundation has developed a collection of tools to articulate and assess its progress toward strategic goals.
- Each tool employs a structured format to promote standardization; flexibility, though, is encouraged in the application of each tool to ensure that form does not dictate function. Each tool provides a template for organizing information that should be tweaked as needed.
- The speed and breadth of adoption of each tool varies and is often related to the ability to communicate and demonstrate the intended benefits. It is important to continue to refine each tool and incorporate it into grantmaking operations to increase its utility to program staff.
- A weakness of each tool is its labor-intensive nature, which makes it resource-intensive in terms of staff time and vulnerable to staff turnover – ultimately raising the question of sustainability.

Introduction

Foundation strategy as defined by the Center for Effective Philanthropy is “a framework for decision making that is focused on the external context in which the foundation works and includes a hypothesized causal connection between use of foundation resources and goal achievement” (Center for Effective Philanthropy, 2007).

Over the past several years, the Center for Effective Philanthropy has examined how grantees, foundation board members, leadership, and staff perceive the use of foundation strategy. Data from surveys and interviews indicate that all parties value strategy and perceive foundations that use strategy to be more effective and capable of impact than those that do not. While strategy is widely accepted as necessary for foundations to maximize their impact, and foundations largely perceive themselves as strategic, research shows that foundations often struggle to articulate, operationalize, and track strategy (Center for Effective Philanthropy, 2007).

The William Penn Foundation has developed a collection of tools – the program plan, markers, and evaluation plan – to 1) clearly and consistently articulate strategy to grantees, board members, and others, and 2) monitor strategy to ensure progress toward goals is made and hypothesized causal connections between use of foundation resources and goal achievement remain relevant in the face of contextual changes. This chapter will explain and show graphically what the tools are and how the foundation uses them to articulate program strategies and goals, as well as hold itself accountable for strategy results. We will discuss how the tools inform program staff discussions with foundation leadership as well as guide program and evaluation staff in the development of their work.

Overview of the William Penn Foundation

The William Penn Foundation is a private, family foundation created in 1945 with contributions from Otto Haas, founder of the Rohm and Haas Chemical Co., and his wife, Phoebe Haas.

Its mission is to improve the quality of life in the Greater Philadelphia region through efforts that foster rich cultural expression, strengthen children's futures, and deepen connections to nature and community. In partnership with others, the foundation works to advance a vital, just, and caring community.

Within each of its three program areas – Children, Youth, and Families; Environment and Communities; and Arts and Culture – the foundation identified several priorities in its 2001 strategic plan in which it seeks to achieve targeted changes. Each priority is further refined with objectives. Strategies are then identified to achieve each objective.¹

Each program area is staffed by a program director and program officer(s). A key responsibility of each program staff is the cultivation of a grant portfolio, which includes the development and execution of program vision, strategy, and goals; review and analysis of grant proposals; and monitoring of grant recipients to ensure that foundation grants are properly and effectively utilized.

Evaluation staff support program staff in the cultivation of their grant portfolio by advising on and managing evaluation work, which is integrated throughout the grantmaking cycle. Specific components of the foundation's evaluation system are defined in the next section.

Tools to Articulate and Track Strategy

Evaluation therefore is an essential precursor to effective strategy in philanthropy. It produces the data, information and understanding that enable Grantmakers to develop and fine-tune their strategies. (Grantmakers for Effective Organizations and the Council on Foundations, 2009, p. 9).

¹ For further information, please visit the foundation's website at <http://www.williampennfoundation.org>.

As part of the William Penn Foundation's implementation of its 2001 strategic plan, an evaluation system was developed that includes the articulation of program strategy and goals, the alignment of grants to strategy, monitoring of progress, and use of outside expertise to further develop strategies, assess implementation of strategy, and evaluate outcomes and impact.

While strategy is widely accepted as necessary for foundations to maximize their impact, and foundations largely perceive themselves as strategic, research shows that foundations often struggle to articulate, operationalize, and track strategy.

There are four basic components of the foundation's evaluation system:

- Enhanced grant monitoring and outputs and outcomes are used to gauge individual grant effectiveness, measure contribution of grant toward the foundation's strategy goals, and learn from grantee experience.
- Key indicators are tracked to inform the foundation about changes in outcomes of interest based on the foundation's objectives and strategies. Two types of key indicators are looked at – community-wide indicators, which are used to measure long-term changes that are influenced by many factors in addition to grantees' work and foundation funding; and strategy indicators, which are used to measure accomplishments that can be reasonably attributed, at least in part, to grantees' work and foundation funding.
- Individual grants or clusters of grants are assessed and evaluated to better understand grantee accomplishments and advance knowl-

edge in areas closely linked to foundation objectives. Some grants or clusters of grants are identified for self-assessment by foundation staff and the grantee, and others are identified for formal, external evaluations.

- Foundation strategies are assessed using the knowledge gained through this combination of monitoring, indicators, and evaluations to monitor progress toward strategy goals and adjust grantmaking strategies and priorities as necessary. In addition, outside expertise may be used for program development and exploration to inform strategy.

These tools are interrelated and, as a whole, provide summative information on what the foundation is trying to do, what it has accomplished thus far, what it has learned, and what it anticipates doing.

It is within the last component – the review of the foundation’s strategies – that evaluation staff have developed three tools to articulate and assess the foundation’s progress toward strategic goals. These tools are interrelated and, as a whole, provide summative information on what the foundation is trying to do, what it has accomplished thus far, what it has learned, and what it anticipates doing.

Each tool is illustrated using the foundation’s School Readiness Program Priority, which is one of the four priorities in the Children, Youth, and Families program area. Funding in this area aims to promote the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive well-being of children from prenatal through age 8 and to facilitate transitions to school. A selection of information is presented in each figure. Tool illustrations are meant to serve as an example of the tool and each of its components; they do not represent the whole of the

foundation’s thinking or work within the School Readiness Program Priority.

Tool No. 1: Program Plan

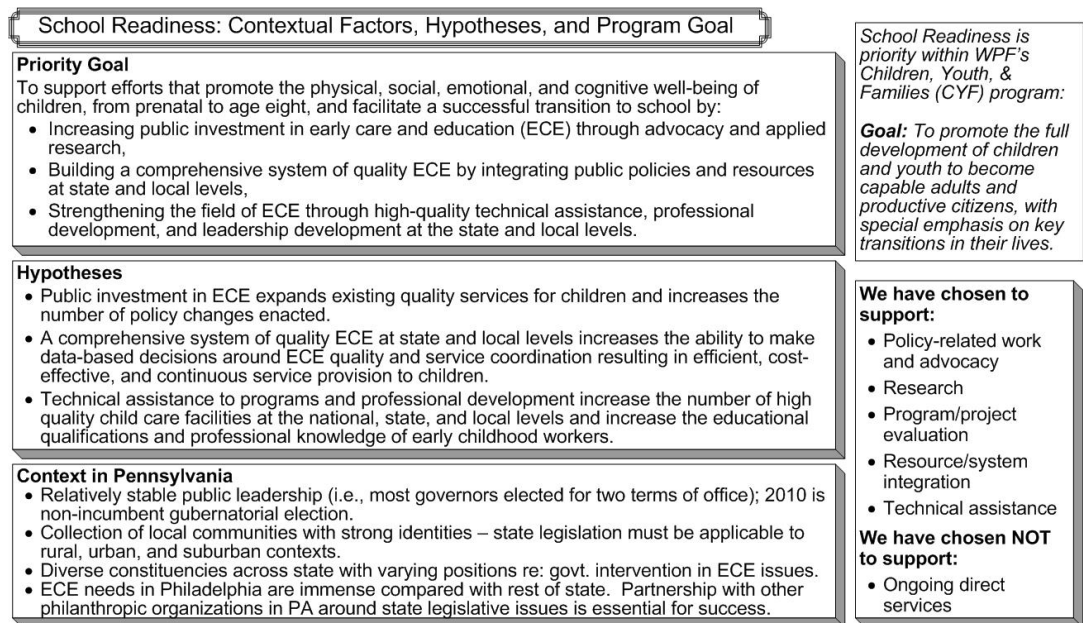
The program plan is a customized logic model or “the graphic depiction of the sequence of actions that describe what a program is and will do” (Taylor-Powell, Jones, & Henert, 2002). The components of the logic model, as documented by the University of Wisconsin-Extension (Taylor-Powell, Jones, & Henert, 2002) include:

1. Inputs: Resources, contributions, investments that go into the program;
2. Outputs: Activities, services, events, and products that reach people who participate or who are targeted;
3. Outcomes: Results or changes for individuals, groups, communities, organizations, communities, or systems;
4. Assumptions: Beliefs about the program, the people involved, the context, and how the program will work; and
5. External factors: Environment in which the program exists includes a variety of external factors that interact with and influence the program action.

The three-page program plan customizes the language and format of the traditional logic model to allow the foundation to not only plan, but also manage, communicate, and evaluate its strategies. A program plan is developed for each grantmaking priority within the foundation’s three program areas.

Components of tool. The overview or first page of the program plan tackles the context (i.e., external factors) and theory (i.e., hypotheses or assumptions) behind each program priority. A recent article by Ferris & Williams (2009) states, “In order to define a system, it is first necessary to identify the essential components inherent in any system: the actors, the rules of the game, and the environmental (ecological) context” (p. 2). Page 1

FIGURE 1 Program Plan – Overview, Page 1



of the program plan begins to define the system that the foundation is trying to change, in terms of four key components (Figure 1: Program Plan – Overview, Page 1):

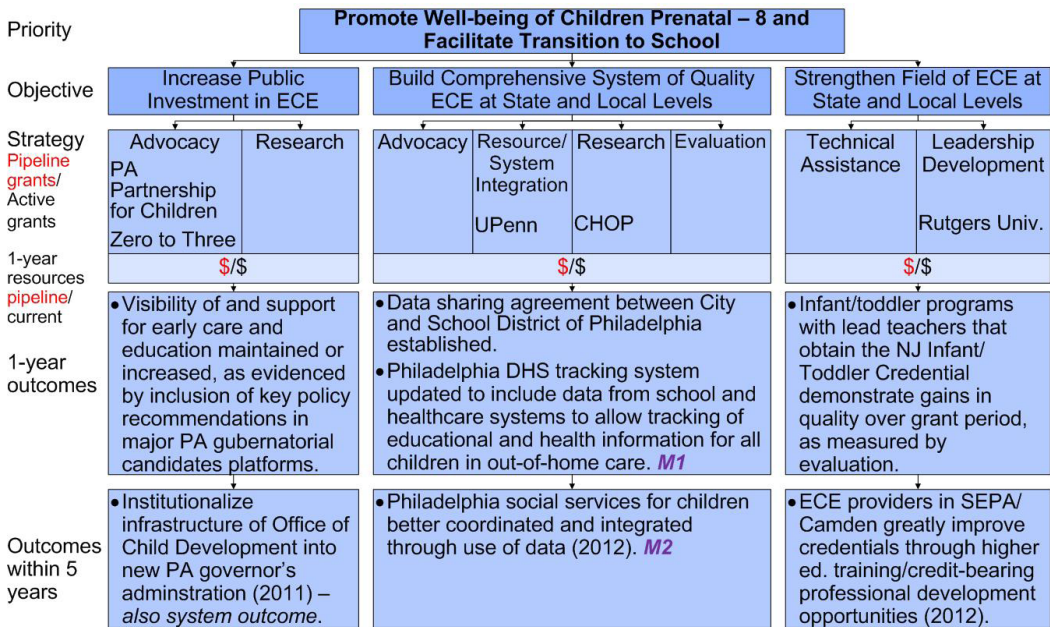
1. **Goal:** The overarching goal for the work is defined and often includes the specific objectives that will be used to reach the goal.
2. **Hypotheses:** The connection between the goal statement and the objectives/strategies are laid out. This section articulates the undergirding of the foundation's thinking – why the objective and strategies employed will achieve the targeted change. Clear articulation of this is especially important to board members. Research indicates that board members want to be involved in and understand the development and assessment of strategy (Center for Effective Philanthropy, 2005).

Related, but separate, sections are often included to convey the rationale (the reasons why the foundation's goals should be reached), assumptions (what program staff believe the situation to be or are taking for granted in their thinking about the strategies), or

concerns (the potential fallout if the system change the foundation is targeting is not made). These elements are interrelated and, therefore, all are not necessary. Form should be dictated by function – not the other way around. Information should be included for the insight it adds, not for the sake of more information. Additionally, information should be organized and presented in the way that makes most sense and is most useful.

3. **Context:** The landscape – governmental, organizational, economic, historic, etc. – is outlined. This is akin to the external factors in the UW-Extension logic model, and is frequently looked at in terms of opportunities and challenges (e.g., a change in state or local political administration).
4. **Supported activities:** Lastly, the choices that program staff and leadership have made in developing the strategies (i.e., the activities the foundation has chosen to support and those that the foundation has chosen not to support) are plainly stated. In order to be strategic, decisions must be made about the types of activities that will best help the foundation to

FIGURE 2 Program Plan – Main, Page 2



achieve its goals. These types of decisions are often confusing to board members, grantees, and other stakeholders. It is important to be upfront, clearly articulate, and be transparent about the activities that the foundation will support. The supported activities are general categories of activities that hint at the logic model's outputs. Outputs are more specifically referenced on Page 2 of the program plan via the grant list.

By defining the system that it is trying to change and updating it periodically, the foundation seeks to ensure that its thinking and expectations around outcomes (articulated on the second page of the program plan) are grounded by current circumstance.

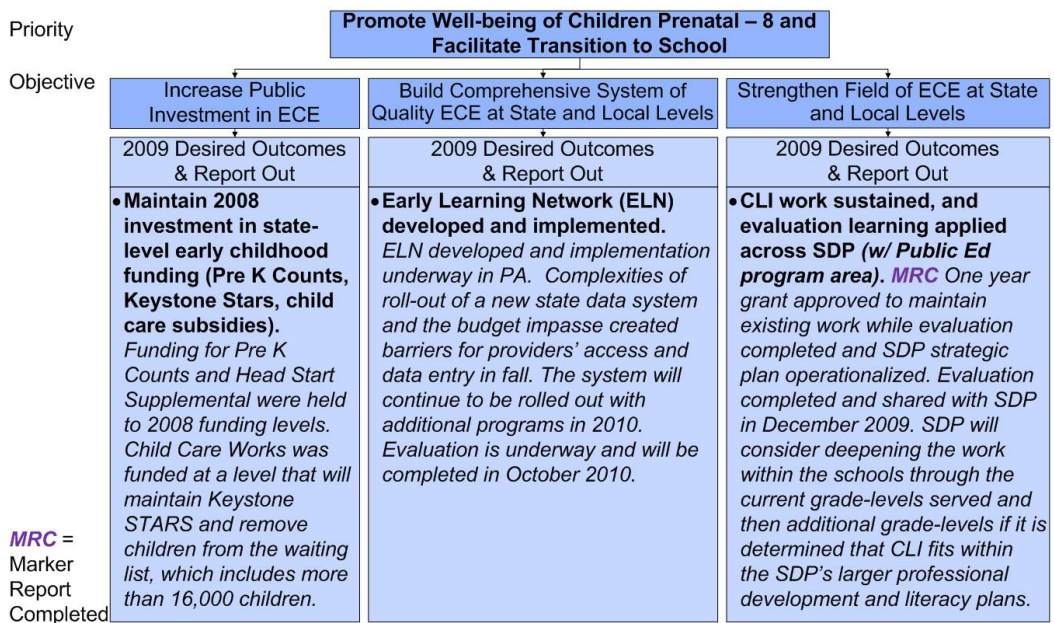
The second page of the program plan aligns objectives and strategies, specific grants, and outcomes. By considering grantees' activities in terms of the program objectives and strategies they support and the outcomes they seek to achieve, program staff and leadership ensure that funded activities are an appropriate fit and help to realize identified foundation goals. The second page of the program plan provides the substance of the logic model by drilling down within each

of the foundation's program objectives to the specific funding strategies employed, the actors or grantees doing the work, the resources dedicated to the work, and the short-term and long-term outcomes targeted (Figure 2: Program Plan – Main, Page 2).

Page 2 of the program plan includes the following six components:

1. Objectives: Sub-goals are identified within each grantmaking priority to provide focus to the overarching goal described on the first page of the program plan.
2. Strategy: On the program plan, the word "strategy" refers to the tactics or activities used to achieve the objective within a priority. These tactics provide the "how" for the foundation strategy, or "the hypothesized causal connection between use of foundation resources and goal achievement." For example, in order to increase public investment in early care and education, advocacy and research are needed.
3. Grants: A foundation works through and achieves its goals in large part through its

FIGURE 3 Program Plan – Report-Out, Page 3



grantees. As such, organizations to which grants have been made or are under consideration are listed. This is a crucial part of both the monitoring and articulation. By lining up grantees' activities (or outputs) to the program objectives and strategies they support, program staff can clearly see the body of work around a particular strategy, more easily gauge whether a prospective grant is really working toward outcome goals, and, last but not least, show board members how recommended grants fit within the body of work. Prospective grantees, referred to as pipeline grants, are listed in red and are confidential.

4. Resources: Grant funds dedicated to the work under each objective are recorded as funds deployed for active grants and funds tentatively allocated for pipeline grants. This allows the foundation to keep track of how many resources (or inputs) are devoted in a given year (operationally defined as payments made or scheduled in the specified year) to the tasks at hand. While crude and far from a sophisticated analysis, this simplistic form of tracking elevates any mismatch between resource level and target goal, ensuring that program staff continually monitor whether work is ad-

equately resourced for success.

5. Short-term outcomes: One-year changes that result from grant-funded project outputs are identified and anchor the foundation by ensuring that benchmarks for longer-term outcomes are set and tracked. Because of the short time frame, one-year outcomes will often mark progress towards the ultimate outcome. In order to ensure that the outcome is measurable, the language "as evidenced by" is often included.
6. Long-term outcomes: As most of the work that is undertaken is multiyear, within-five-year outcomes are established. These longer-term outcomes mark the target accomplishments of several grants working in tandem and allow a realistic look at what the foundation aims to achieve with its funding over the next several years.

The final page of the program plan is a report-out on the prior year's outcomes. Foundation staff document progress made on their one-year outcomes at the end of each year. This again helps to ensure that progress is made toward reaching longer-term goals. It also ensures new targets can

be set, if mid-course corrections are needed because goals are not being met or external circumstances change, invalidating the original goals. It allows for the foundation to be accountable to itself in the use of its funds (Figure 3: Program Plan – Report-Out, Page 3).

Foundation staff document progress made on their one-year outcomes at the end of each year. [Documenting progress] ensures new targets can be set, if mid-course corrections are needed because goals are not being met or external circumstances change, invalidating the original goals.

Tool development and update. At its most basic level, the development of the program plan serves a process function by bringing together the program officers who are involved in the work to discuss the core elements of the strategy and reach a common understanding. Evaluation staff facilitate this process.

Development of the program plan is not a linear process; in fact, it is often quite circular, with development of the first and second pages of the plan happening in tandem. While evaluation staff typically initiate a program-plan discussion by drafting the goal, context, and hypotheses, these components are tweaked and refined as the substance of the work takes form on Page 2. As such, the order in which the components of the program plan are presented in the text is not meant to be a prescriptive guideline for facilitating the development of a program plan; rather, it is meant to provide an overview of the key components that should be included. Similarly, the layout of Figures 1, 2, and 3 are geared to communication, not process. For example, on Page 2 of the

program plan, “Outcomes Within 5 Years” are located in the lower quadrant of the plan; however, evaluation staff often find that both during development and update of the plans, starting Page 2 with a discussion of the longer-term outcomes is helpful to keeping the eyes of program staff on the larger goals of work rather than the individual grants that make up the work.

Once drafted, the program plan is used to promote a common understanding of the overall program strategy (Page 2), as well as the context from which the strategy was developed and in which it is being enacted (Page 1), among the president, other program staff, and board members. This approach allows for peer review and offers the opportunity for priority goals and assumptions to be challenged and clarified.

While the overview (Page 1) is updated periodically, the second and third pages of the program plan are updated in full each year by program staff under the direction of evaluation staff. An annual look allows the foundation to take stock of what was accomplished in the last year, what it hopes to get done in the current year, and if it is on the track toward longer-term outcomes. The within-five-year outcomes in particular are susceptible to contextual changes given the complex systems in which grantees work. Within-five-year outcomes may be modified if contextual changes are significant. Any modification to a longer-term outcome must be reviewed and approved by the president. This is a built-in check to the system to assure that goals are not routinely or quietly reset or removed. The grants section of the plan (Page 2) is updated three times a year in advance of each foundation board meeting.

The update of a program plan takes about 10 hours of staff time (i.e., five hours of evaluation staff time, four hours of program staff time, and one hour of administrative staff time) over the course of a year. With nine priorities across three program areas, about 90 hours of staff time is devoted each year to the update of the program plans. Evaluation and program staff time is largely dedicated to discussion and drafting of new goals and report-outs, but also includes time for review

of grant documents in preparation for meetings and post-meeting review and tweaking of the program plan. Administrative staff time is devoted solely to the tri-annual update of the grants section of the plan.

Initial development of the program plan is harder to estimate. Development time varies greatly, based on the complexity of a strategy as well as how developed a strategy is when the process is initiated.

Tool use. Program staff are encouraged to use their program plans regularly as a guidepost for their work. By reviewing the program plan and considering all proposed grants in light of the body of work around a particular strategy, program staff ensure that strategy is at the center of their decision making. This is especially critical when several program staff are working on a particular strategy and have joint ownership of the grant activities and short- and long-term outcomes that are expected to follow. While program officers may be able to mentally manage their portfolio and consider how a new opportunity fits, it is unlikely that they are able to do the same for a colleague's portfolio. The program plan represents all work, across program-staff portfolios, which relate to a specific priority.

In the past year, program staff have requested the development of drill-down program plans for sub-areas of work that are embedded across several priorities (and therefore program plans) in order to get a better handle on the work and the strategies being employed to achieve targeted outcomes. This has occurred with priorities within a program area and across two programs areas. An example of the latter is arts education for children and youth. For this sub-area of work, grants are made through the public education priority in the Children, Youth, and Families program area and the Strategic Opportunities priority in the Arts and Culture program area. While this has been a successful tactic for breaking down silos of work, use of sub-area program plans must be integrated into regular cross-program staff meetings in order to be most effective.

In addition to its use as guidepost for staff work, the program plan is used to communicate progress related to each grantmaking priority to the president, other program staff, and board members. This is done with varying frequency and in different forums. Below, key points in time are identified when programs plans are formally shared; program plans are available at any point in time to the president, program staff, and board members.

The program plan is used to promote a common understanding of the overall program strategy, as well as the context from which the strategy was developed and in which it is being enacted, among the president, other program staff, and board members. This approach allows for peer review and offers the opportunity for priority goals and assumptions to be challenged and clarified.

- President: The program plan for each priority is shared by program and evaluation staff in each program area with the president at the beginning of each year to review the accomplishments and challenges of the previous year and engage in a thoughtful discussion around the new year's goals.
- Program staff: The program plans are shared with all program staff twice a year in advance of program-planning discussions. Program-planning discussions are one-hour discussions led by each program-area team intended to inform other program areas of work in an effort to break down silos and foster conversation among all program staff on cross-program

FIGURE 4 Example of Marker

June 2011: Assess progress of city in implementing of practice and policy changes based on the results of the research projects (staff). *Findings will be used to determine if sufficient progress is being made to institutionalize the work.* **M2**

issues and interests.

- Board members: The program plans are shared, in a modified form, with board members at each of the three foundation board meetings. The modified form is streamlined and used to highlight how proposed grants fit with the strategy.²

The program plan is not shared directly with grantees. However, the development process and graphic product provide program officers with clear and consistent language to describe to grantees the foundation's overarching goal, why the objective and strategies it plans to employ can achieve the targeted change, the type of activities it funds (and doesn't fund), and the specific outcomes it believes grantee work will lead to. Use of clear and consistent messaging is documented as one of the most valued foundation characteristics by nonprofits and a predictor of grantee satisfaction (Center for Effective Philanthropy, 2004).

Tool No. 2: Markers

In the spring of 2008, the foundation added markers to its evaluation system to track specific milestones related to grants. Markers are points in time, or events, when information is received (e.g., evaluation report) or decisions made (e.g., release of a local or state budget). A marker allows for a planned pause to take stock of and document learning, which is the basis for further grant decision-making.

Components of tool. A marker (Figure 4) is defined by the following components:

1. Expected date of review: The anticipated month and year of an event or decision is recorded and updated to note if a delay has occurred. Future grant decision-making is timed accordingly. The presence of a marker ensures that grant decision-making does not

occur in the absence of the expected information.

2. Event description: The information to be received or decision to be made is described.
3. Reviewer: The reviewer is the group or entity responsible for generating the information. When the event is an evaluation report, the reviewer is the individual or firm who carried out the evaluation. When the event is an assessment of circumstances, the reviewer is foundation staff (evaluation and program).
4. Potential use of information: A statement of how information resulting from the marker will be used is often included.
5. Identifier: Each marker is given an identifier – the letter M plus a number. The identifier is unique to the priority and identifies on the evaluation plan (to be discussed in next section) and program plan the evaluation activities and short- and long-term outcomes that the marker is related to.

A full list of markers related to a priority is located at the bottom of the first page of the evaluation plan in the "Marker" section. The evaluation plan (to be discussed) is a two-page document (Figure 5: Evaluation Plan – Page 1; Figure 6: Evaluation Plan – Page 2).

Tool development and update. The need for a marker is identified when a grant is made or strategy developed. Program staff, evaluation staff, or the president can identify the need for a marker. Evaluation staff maintain a master list of markers in Excel for all grantmaking priorities within each program area.

When a milestone or marker is reached, evaluation staff alert program staff and a review

² Please contact the author for further information.

FIGURE 5 Evaluation Plan – Page 1

Priority	Promote Well-Being of Children Prenatal - 8 and Facilitate Transition to School		
Objective	Increase Public Investment in ECE	Build Comprehensive System of Quality ECE at State and Local Levels	Strengthen Field of ECE at State and Local Levels
	Evaluation work		
Underway		UPENN (due July 2012): Development of Policy Analysis Center and assessment of its cost effectiveness through high priority projects designed to improve services for children and youth. <i>M1</i> CHOP (due March 2013): Phase II of Children's Stability and Well-being Study to analyze needs of Philadelphia children in child welfare with intent of identifying and demonstrating service strategies and policy reforms to improve the educational and health outcomes. <i>M2</i>	Rutgers (due December 2010): Evaluation of Professional Development Pathways Initiative.
To be done			
Markers		June 2011: Assess progress of city in implementation of practice and policy changes based on the results of the research projects (staff). Findings will be used to determine if sufficient progress is being made to institutionalize the work. <i>M1</i> March 2013: Receive Phase II CSAW evaluation (CHOP). <i>M2</i>	

resulting in a one-page write-up is undertaken to consider and document the characterizing event (Figure 7: Marker Report). The completed marker report is attached to the file of each related grant and the identifier (referenced above) is replaced with “MRC” or “Marker Report Completed.”

Key elements of the marker report include the following:

1. Marker: The description of the point in time, or event, when information is received (e.g., evaluation report) or a decision is made (e.g., release of a local or state budget) identifies the subject of the Marker Report. (See section “Components of markers.”)
2. Summary statement: A one- to three-sentence summary of the event is included to highlight the main take-away message. Bold italic font is used to draw attention to this statement.
3. Review of event: A synopsis of the event includes the details of the review. The structure of the synopsis is tailored to the type of event. For example, if the event is the receipt of an

evaluation report, the synopsis would include the key evaluation findings and recommendations, as well as a description of the program and evaluation design.

4. Related grants: Any active or prospective grants that are related to the marker are listed. The marker report is then attached to the grant file of each grant.

Occasionally, when a marker is reached, it is determined that the event is not ready for review. The timeline for the marker may be modified, but the modification must be clearly noted within the text of the marker. This built-in check to the system, similar to the protocol for modifications to within-five-year outcomes, ensures that goal posts are not routinely or quietly moved.

From development to review and write-up, each marker requires roughly three hours of evaluation staff time. With an average of 48 markers processed in a year, evaluation staff allocate about one day (eight hours) a month to markers. Program staff time is minimal and ranges from one to four hours a year.

FIGURE 6 Evaluation Plan – Page 2

Priority	Promote Well-Being of Children Prenatal - 8 and Facilitate Transition to School		
Objective	Increase Public Investment in ECE	Build Comprehensive System of Quality ECE at State and Local Levels	Strengthen Field of ECE at State and Local Levels
	Evaluation work		
Done	Temple University (2004): Evaluation of Child Care Matters. Temple College of Liberal Arts (2006): Impact study of child care subsidies for former welfare recipients. <i>Findings confirmed existence of issues previously identified with anecdotal evidence. DPW is currently working to improve the system.</i>	Penn Graduate School of Education (2006): Institutionalizing the Early Childhood Experiences Interview in SDP. CHOP (2007): Evaluation of intervention program for children whose mothers are cognitively impaired. University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development (2008): Early Childhood Assessment and Accountability Project to assess publicly funded early learning programs in PA.	OMG (2010): Evaluation of Children's Literacy Initiative in Philadelphia. <i>The two-year evaluation of the Children's Literacy Initiative - Model Classrooms conducted in kindergarten and first grade classrooms in 15 schools across the SDP indicated that annual achievement of students in schools with Model Classrooms was better than the achievement of students in comparison schools. Longitudinal analyses, which examined the longer-term (two- and three-year) performance of students who attended kindergarten or first grade in schools with Model Classrooms, showed varied results. MRC</i>
MRC = Marker Report Completed			

Tool use. The marker system is a management and planning tool and is used in a variety of ways:

- A list of markers is reviewed in monthly program team meetings with the president in order to highlight key events that are coming up in the course of the year.
- Marker reports are used in monthly program team meetings with the president when grants are discussed and recommendations made.

Tool No. 3: Evaluation Plan

The foundation commissions a range of evaluative work to assess progress in its strategies, specific grants, and fields of interests. Evaluative work includes program evaluations, foundation strategy reviews, and program development activities. Evaluative work is commissioned through both contracts and grants. The foundation uses contracts (administrative funds) for evaluations commissioned from for-profit firms and individuals or for evaluations that generate information solely for foundation use (e.g., a study of foundation operations). The foundation makes grants for evaluations when the evaluator is a nonprofit organization, the evaluation has a public purpose, or the evaluation is part of a program grant.

Components of tool. The evaluation plan is essentially a list of all evaluative work for each grantmaking priority, regardless of type or funding mechanism. Like the program plan, work is organized by the objectives within each priority. Unlike the program plan, the evaluation plan does not drill down to the strategy (or tactic) level. The plan has four sections, which are briefly described below (Figure 5: Evaluation Plan, Page 1; Figure 6: Evaluation Plan, Page 2):

1. Under way: Evaluation activities that are in progress are listed with the name of the evaluator/researcher, timeline for completion, and a brief description of the activity.
2. To be done: Grants or strategies that are likely to need evaluation are identified, with an approximate timeline for project consideration, development, and initiation, if known.
3. Markers: Specific milestones related to grants are pinpointed, with the date of review. See “Tool No. 2: Markers” for details.
4. Done: Completed evaluations are listed with the name of the evaluator/researcher, year of

FIGURE 7 Marker Report

Marker: January 2010: Receive results of CLI evaluation (OMG). Findings and SDP use of findings will determine whether further WPF investment is warranted.

The two-year evaluation of the Children's Literacy Initiative - Model Classrooms conducted in kindergarten and first grade classrooms in 15 schools across the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) indicated that annual achievement of students in schools with Model Classrooms was better than the achievement of students in comparison schools. Longitudinal analyses, which examined the longer-term (two- and three-year) performance of students who attended kindergarten or first grade in schools with Model Classrooms, showed varied results. Findings were shared with SDP in December 2009. SDP will determine whether CLI fits within the SDP's larger professional development and literacy plans.

Summary of Evaluation Findings:

OMG was commissioned by the Foundation during winter 2008 to conduct an evaluation to understand the specific benefits and challenges experienced by the teachers, principals, and Reading First Coaches involved with Model Classrooms as well as the effect of Model Classrooms on students. The final report submitted to the William Penn Foundation, Children's Literacy Initiative (CLI), and the SDP on December 31, 2009 provided the following findings:

The annual achievement of students in schools with Model Classrooms was better than the achievement of students in comparison schools.

- Consistently more kindergarten students in schools with Model Classrooms reached district literacy benchmarks than students in comparison schools. A grade-level effect was documented for kindergarten in 2006-07.
- District-wide there is a decline in the proportion of students reaching first grade benchmarks, but students in schools with Model Classrooms fared better than students in comparison schools. A grade-level effect was documented for first grade during both 2007-08 and 2008-09.
- Significantly more Black, non-ELL students reached proficiency in schools with Model Classrooms.
- Altogether, Latino students (regardless of ELL status) in schools with Model Classrooms fared better than those in comparison schools during 2008-09. Latino-ELL students had more varied outcomes.

Longitudinal analyses, which examined the longer-term (two- and three-year) performance of students who attended kindergarten or first grade in schools with Model Classrooms, showed varied results. In two out of three cohorts studied, those who had attended schools with Model Classrooms fared better than those who had attended comparison schools; in the third case, there was no significant difference between the groups. Based on these analyses, it is difficult to assess the longer-term effects of Model Classroom participation on students.

The District partnership with CLI led to improved relationships among those implementing the program at the school level. Stakeholders reported a high degree of satisfaction with Model Classrooms and believed that Model Classrooms benefited students in their schools.

- Almost all principals from schools with Model Classrooms indicated that Model Classrooms had changed the way they think about or approach literacy goals for K-3rd grade students.
- Both principals and Reading First Coaches reported that Model Classrooms helped to improve literacy in their schools. They were more likely than those from comparison schools to report being satisfied with K-3rd grade achievement at their schools.
- The majority of Model Classroom teachers reported that their relationships with other teachers and school administrators improved since they became Model Classroom teachers. Reading First Coaches in schools with Model Classrooms were more likely than those in comparison schools to report having daily interaction with their principal and receiving support from their principal.

Evaluation Recommendations:

- Continue periodic monitoring of achievement. In particular, continue to examine the achievement of students in Model Classrooms compared to colleague classrooms to determine whether there is a grade-level effect.
- Continue to consider ways in which District staff and CLI Professional Developers can help first grade teachers assist their students to obtain meaningful oral reading fluency.
- Continue to pursue understanding of which elements of Model Classrooms are most supportive of literacy development for Black, non-ELL students.
- Continue investigating why Latino ELL students at schools with Model Classrooms are not doing as well as their peers at comparison schools.

Related Grants:

Children's Literacy Initiative (6/26/09 – 6/25/10). To sustain the Model Classroom Project in 19 District elementary schools.

completion, a brief description of the activity, and, often, a short summary of information generated through the activity. This allows an at-a-glance look of what information is available from past evaluation activities.

Tool development and update. The evaluation plan is an accounting of evaluation activities. Its development largely involves the culling of information from other data repositories (e.g., GIFTS grant management software, foundation contract files). The plan is updated biannually by evaluation staff in collaboration with program staff. By updating the plan at the beginning of the year and midway through, evaluation staff ensure that there is specific time allocated outside of the grantmaking cycle to reflect on what type of evaluative activities are needed to inform grantmaking.

The evaluation plan is essentially a list of all evaluative work for each grantmaking priority, regardless of type or funding mechanism.

Biannual update of each evaluation plan requires about three hours of evaluation staff time and two hours of program staff time a year. With nine evaluation plans, this translates into a total of 27 hours of evaluation staff time and 18 hours of program staff time a year.

Tool use. While the program plan has many functions (planning, management, communication, and evaluation of strategy), the evaluation plan serves fewer purposes (planning and management). The evaluation plan provides a central location for all evaluative work completed under a priority. It is formally shared concurrent with the program plan with the president and other program staff; key points in time are detailed in “Tool No. 1: Program Plan.”

Discussion

“Strategy in the world of philanthropy is uniquely challenging” (Center for Effective Philanthropy, 2009.)

The program plan, markers, and evaluation plan were each created in response to a need identified by foundation leadership or staff (program and evaluation). As such, each tool has been designed with consideration to the foundation context, including the unique and complex role that a strategic foundation takes on in trying to achieve systemic change through grantee activities.

- The program plan customizes the traditional logic model by orienting it around the grant portfolio, including a look at the resources or foundation funding allocated to achieve targeted outcomes.
- The marker acknowledges the vast array of information with which program staff and leadership interact and the sometimes unsynchronized timelines of the grantmaking cycle and real-world events, providing a tickler system to ensure that knowledge derived from important events is utilized in grant decision-making.
- The evaluation plan provides a catalogue of the various evaluative activities completed, under way, and planned to show how and when the foundation will know which strategies are successful and which require some modification or mid-course correction.

Tool Limitations

Over the last decade, the foundation’s evaluation system has matured alongside its thinking about strategy. The tools discussed were developed at various times over the past decade and continue to be refined and integrated into grantmaking operations. Below, three challenges encountered in the use of each tool are identified.

Program staff use. The speed and breadth of adoption of a new tool or practice across an organization varies and often is related to the ability to communicate and demonstrate the intended benefits (Fraser, 2009). There are several frameworks that consider stages of adoption. The Stages of

Technology Adoption Checklist identifies five stages: entry (learning to use tool); adoption (use of tool to support work); adaptation (use of tool to enrich work); appropriation (tool is integrated); and invention (discover new uses for tool) (CEO Forum on Education and Technology, 1999).³

Currently, program staff straddle the stages of adoption and adaptation. As previously noted, at the most basic level, the application of each tool serves a process function by bringing together program staff to discuss and reach a common understanding of elements of the work. On the lower end of the spectrum, program staff comply with the update of each tool and, while they note the value of each tool and the update process, the tools are not fully integrated into the day-to-day work. They support, rather than enhance, the work. On the higher end of the spectrum, program staff request the application of the tools to sub-areas that exist within or across program priorities – a more detailed level of work – demonstrating appreciation of the utility of the tools and desire to use the tools to enrich the work.

The ultimate goal, in terms of the process function, is for program staff to use their program plans regularly as a guidepost for their work. As evaluation staff continue to refine the tools, increasing utility and benefit to program staff, the foundation hopes to reach the appropriation stage – fully integrating the tools into the day-to-day work.

Labor-intensive nature of tools. A weakness of each tool is its labor-intensive nature, which makes it resource-intensive in terms of staff time and vulnerable to staff turnover – ultimately raising the question of sustainability. Evaluation staff work intensively with program staff to update and maintain the program plan (overview assessed periodically; outcomes set annually; grant list updated triannually), and the evaluation plan

(biannually). The most labor-intensive tool – the program plan – on average requires 10 staff hours per plan to update each year.

Markers, the newest tool, are maintained and tracked by evaluation staff using Excel. Unlike the other tools that have scheduled updates, the marker system is an ongoing process that requires continuous care and feeding. That said, markers, also unlike the other tools, are capable of automation. A goal for 2011 is the incorporation of marker tracking into the foundation's grant-management database system. Increased automation of this tool will help to address its sustainability.

The ultimate goal, in terms of the process function, is for program staff to use their program plans regularly as a guidepost for their work.

Restrictive framework. Each tool calls for alignment of grants with strategy and outcomes. The foundation, however, may support work that cuts across strategies or work that is peripheral. The restrictive framework fulfills the foundation's desire to clearly define the targeted objectives and the tactics used to achieve them; it may not, however, provide the amount of flexibility needed to capture some of the more nuanced work the foundation funds in support of its goals but not aligned directly with specific objectives and strategies. This work may be forced into a category, which is a less-than-perfect fit.

Value-Added of Tools

Given each tool is labor-intensive, it is crucial that it adds value that is appreciated by program staff and leadership. The tools described – individually and as a collection – are considered valuable by program staff and leadership in planning, managing, communicating, and evaluating strategy because they provide a system to review a grant portfolio as it is built and refined and to track progress toward targeted outcomes. The process

³ The Stages of Technology Adoption Checklist describes how teachers typically pass through several distinct stages before they become education technology integrators and innovators. In this article, the framework used by the Stages of Technology Adoption Checklist is applied to tool adoption to underscore the idea that understanding and proficient use of a new tool takes time.

These tools have increased the foundation's ability to hold itself accountable by providing a formal mechanism for staff to set and report out on benchmarks and goals. Integration is key and, while integration of the tools into grantmaking operations is still under way, appeals from program staff and leadership to apply the tools to new areas that exist within or across program priorities are encouraging evidence of the tools' use to enrich the foundation's work.

and the resulting graphic products also ensure program staff thoroughly and systematically consider the context in which they are working and the hypothesized causal connections between the use of the foundation's resources and goal achievement. While use of the tools has not been formally evaluated, observation (e.g., program staff request to apply tools to sub-areas) and inquiry (e.g., feedback) suggest program staff and leadership appreciate the utility of the tools and desire to continue to use the tools to enrich their work.

In addition to the informal measures of staff satisfaction, there is a certain amount of anecdotal evidence that speaks to the tools' effectiveness. One example is of the recent use of the program plan in the refinement of one of the foundation's priority areas. The refinement involved the exploration of a potential new funding area related to state policy and was grounded in research commissioned by the foundation. While the research was helpful in providing the context, including

the challenges and opportunities, it also presented somewhat of an obstacle – it was a massive amount of information that directed the foundation's attention to several different targets. When program staff discussions intended to establish a direction for moving forward began to be circuitous and unproductive, it was decided to utilize a program plan to drill down on the sub-area of work. The program plan allowed evaluation staff to assist program staff in organizing the information and considering it in terms of the short- and long-term goals of the foundation and the "players" or potential grantees equipped to move the work forward. This focused the discussions, and a strategy emerged relatively quickly.

Conclusion

A tool is only as good as the utility and benefit that is derived from it. While there are clear limitations around the use of each tool, in terms of program staff adoption, labor-intensity, and a restrictive framework, limitations are outweighed by the utility of the tool and the benefit derived. By developing a collection of interrelated tools to assist in the articulation, implementation, and tracking of strategy, the foundation has increased program staff ability to communicate strategy to leadership, grantees, and board members, as well as have a more interconnected and thoughtful dialogue among staff within and across program areas. Additionally, these tools have increased the foundation's ability to hold itself accountable by providing a formal mechanism for staff to set and report out on benchmarks and goals. Integration is key and, while integration of the tools into grantmaking operations is still under way, appeals from program staff and leadership to apply the tools to new areas that exist within or across program priorities are encouraging evidence of the tools' use to enrich the foundation's work.

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